

Chairpersons, Members of the Committee, and Honored Guests,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in strong support of this resolution urging Congress to establish federal protections for the wild horse herd of Theodore Roosevelt National Park.

These horses are more than just wildlife; they are living symbols of our past, deeply woven into the history and culture of North Dakota. Theodore Roosevelt himself saw wild horses on these very lands, and they remain a tangible link to the era that shaped him into one of our nation's greatest conservationists. Today, they are North Dakota's only wild horse herd, and their continued presence in the park honors our history, enriches our culture, and strengthens our connection to the land.

Beyond their historical significance, these horses provide economic and social value to our state. Tourism is a vital part of North Dakota's economy, and Theodore Roosevelt National Park is a major attraction. Visitors come from across the country and around the world to see the park's breathtaking landscapes and to witness these majestic horses roaming free. The presence of these wild horses enhances the park's appeal, drawing nature enthusiasts, photographers, and families eager to experience the wonder of seeing them in their natural habitat. The financial benefits to local businesses, hotels, restaurants, and shops are undeniable.

Perhaps most importantly, these horses create a unique and personal connection between the public and the park. Unlike other wildlife, individual horses can be easily identified by their unique markings and characteristics. This makes it possible for people to form deep, lasting bonds with specific horses, following their stories through social media, visiting the park to see them in person, and advocating for their well-being. This level of engagement has fostered a passionate community of supporters not only in North Dakota but across the nation and even internationally. The dedication of these supporters demonstrates the immense value these horses bring—not just as a tourist attraction but as beloved icons of the park itself.

Despite their importance, the long-term future of these horses is uncertain. Management decisions by the National Park Service have raised significant concerns about the health and preservation of the herd. Without clear federal protections, there is no guarantee that these horses will remain a part of the park's landscape for future generations to experience and cherish.

I urge you to support this resolution and send a strong message to Congress that the wild horses of Theodore Roosevelt National Park deserve federal protection. By taking this action, we can ensure that these magnificent animals continue to roam free, inspiring visitors, boosting our economy, and preserving a vital piece of our state's history.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I respectfully ask for your support in protecting North Dakota's only wild horse herd.